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Bishop Hugh L. Burleson
of South Dakota

The Soul of the Indian

156 Fifth Avenue
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I believe, Mr. Chairman, it was a dweller of California who was also accused of exaggeration, and replied by saying that it was impossible to exaggerate the beauties of the climate of California.

You have done everything tonight, thus far, to make me feel at home. Dr. Thompson has reminded me that I am back in my old home, has assured me that the deaf old fellows will stay to the bitter end, has arranged to have a gathering of ladies, such as I am accustomed to speak to in our church, and has even seen to it that the waiters pass the contribution plate. So surely I ought to be able now, with a good heart, to go on with the topic that is set before me.

I have my watch out. It is not necessary to remind me further that you are at the end of a long day, and have had many committee meetings, and that it is only under great stress, strain and determination that you are remaining to hear me. I shall try to make the ordeal easy.

It is a very audacious white man who attempts to talk about the soul of the Indian! and yet perhaps after thirty years in more or less close contact with Indian life—because my father was a missionary on an Indian reservation, and it is almost thirty years ago that I was adopted into an Indian tribe, and I have two Indian names, and am the bishop of more Indians than all the other bishops of the Episcopal Church put together—because of these things I may feel privileged, perhaps, to delve into the habit, life and thought of the first Americans.

Most of us realize, at times, how prone we are to judge other people by our own background and our own framework. I believe therein lies the failure of a good deal of our missionary work. We are condescending to people; we are passing them something from a superior height; we who know so much, and are so much, and have so much, are handing it down to somebody less fortunate. All that may be true, but the trouble is that we want to hand down not only the facts, but our interpretation of the facts. We want people not only to take Christianity, but to take the same

brand, color, kind and complexion that we have ourselves discovered; and if they fail, we feel there must be something wrong with them. We have tried by governmental processes to make just a fair average white man out of the Indian. We have not succeeded, I am glad to say, and I hope we never shall, because to try to make a white man out of an Indian is to spoil a perfectly good Indian without making a very satisfactory white man. The same situation exists with regard to the Negro. In other words, we have our own racial way of understanding things, and we must remember, when we are thinking of other races, to think of them in terms of their own surroundings, their own experience and their own ideals of life. The misunderstandings between the Government and Indian peoples, the misunderstandings between the Indian peoples and their white neighbors, have largely been a matter of this lack of orientation, this inability to know what the other man is thinking about, and why he thinks as he does. Back of the things that seem unintelligible to us, there is in the Indian a different quality of soul, a different attitude toward life, a differing concept of things.

When I became a Secretary of our Board of Missions, one of the first things I had to do was to go over our lantern slides, which were sent out free, and I tackled the set on the Indians. Of course it began with a picture of a war dance—a very poor picture of a very impossible war dance, but it served the purpose of opening up the subject—and then pretty soon it passed to another picture; two pictures on the same slide, with the legend "before and after." One was the Indian before Christianity had touched him and the other after the light had reached him. The picture representing the Indian before Christianity, showed a tepee out on the Dakota prairies, with an Indian squaw splitting wood near the door of the tepee, while in the background an Indian man sat smoking his pipe. The after-Christianity view was a picture of an Indian family crossing a river, the woman sitting in the stern of the boat, the man pulling the oars. That was the effect of Christianity upon Indian life! It made the man get up, lay down his pipe and row his wife across the river! I broke that slide, then and there. In the first place, it was a pitiful comparison even if true—and it was not true. It was based entirely on our conception of a division of domestic service—the kind of thing a man ought to do, and the sort of thing that seems a woman's task. It had nothing whatever to do with the Christian faith. It would be just as sensible to show an Irishman smoking his pipe in the kitchen while his wife washed the dishes. In the Indian conception of life there is

no more reason for the first than for the second. It is merely a question of customs and conventions. It is through that kind of picture and that sort of background that we have interpreted the soul of the Indian. So many times we have taken some little, inconspicuous, unnecessary thing, that was not related to the real, deep questions involved, and have made it the basis upon which we judge a whole race. Or we have taken something which to us meant one thing and to the Indian another, and have based our judgment on that.

In the soul of the Indian, as I have seen it—and some of them have let me look,—I find qualities which are at first sight surprising.

First, I believe the Indian is a far more naturally religious person than the white man. I think the Almighty God has His hardest job with the Anglo-Saxon race. It is awfully hard for us to be really religious. Dr. Anthony accuses me of having said in my speech in Wichita that you cannot be a Christian in New York. That was not quite correct. I have lived in New York and I claim to be a Christian. But I did say that it is mighty hard to be a Christian in New York. It is hard anywhere. Yet one reason why the Indian is a naturally religious person is because he does not live in New York. He is out there on the plains, living the life of the open, the life of God's big world, under the free sky and on the broad prairie; and it is so much easier to believe in God when you are in His home than when you are separated from Him by scores of secondary causes. It is a great deal easier to believe in the cow when you see her milked than if you get your milk from the milkman. We are living in a wilderness of brick and mortar, and in the midst of a mass of machinery set up to make life good. The Indian is nearer the deep springs of life, and he realizes that back of them are eternal purposes and eternal love. And so perhaps it is not because he is of a different nature that he is naturally religious, but because he has the simpler surroundings which we cannot have. Yet I do think that there is an instinctive spirit of religion in the Indian people. I have never seen an Indian who was not a believer in God. Yet we think of going to the Indian as a heathen race. They have had God always, in their daily life. The God they believed in was the Great Spirit. When the Indian went out of the door of his tepee in the morning, he said his prayer to the Spirit who sent the sun; when he smoked his pipe he raised it to the four quarters of the globe and murmured a prayer to the Spirit who sent him the good things of life. Most of the Indian dances that we talk

about had a religious significance. Religion went along with the experiences of his life. God was near by. So the first thing I find in the soul of the Indian is a very simple disposition to believe in God, to accept the concept of the spiritual back of the material.

Then, perhaps because of that, perhaps as a part of it, the next thing in the Indian soul that I see is *sensibility*—a keen quickness of perception of the relations and the portent of things. You know, people think that an Indian is stolid and stupid; that he does not smile, and cannot laugh, and does not discriminate. It is Anglo-Saxon dullness and stupidity that makes us believe that. I am constantly impressed with the thought that they must be laughing at us for understanding them so little. I will tell you, for example, what we have done for the Indian toward interpreting him to our race and to history; the kind of picture we have written of him, the kind of person we have said he was, the way we have recorded his soul on canvas and in story books and histories. You know how you thought about an Indian in the days when you read the United States history with such care and such difficulty. The Indian was, to you, a sort of tiger, a person of tremendous, tireless patience and relentless cruelty; a beast of prey, not a human being. I remember, as I read the stories of him, how fearfully I admired him, as I would some stealthy panther; a splendid thing, but an inhuman thing. Well, the Indian conducted warfare according to his fashion, but I had a letter from one of our Sioux boys, one of a fine group of Indians, who had gone over with the army to France, and he gave a suggestive comment on modern warfare. He said: "I try to do everything they tell me, but some of it seems awful bloodthirsty!" The Indians volunteered far more generously and promptly than the white boys. Not a single district that included an Indian reservation in South Dakota had to resort to the draft, because the Indian boys volunteered so promptly. The first soldier of South Dakota to receive a decoration in France was Chauncey Eagle-Horn, who afterwards gave his life for his country and lies under one of those wooden crosses in France. He was a son of men who fought against our own flag under Red Cloud and Sitting Bull.

Yet, we have thought of the Indian as a stupid, a stolid, an inhuman thing. The Indian in warfare was only trying to defend himself. Put yourself in his place. Think what your soul would have been under the same circumstances. We thought of him as a dull person, of small understanding, when all the time we have been dull ourselves. The Indian's problem is you and me. He can be whatever you and I

think he can be. His capacities are fine, but they do not get an outlet unless we believe in him.

I want to show you what we have done to him in some respects. There is the matter of our translation of his language. Some instances of our interpretation of his names will point a moral. How about, "Young-Man-Afraid-of-His-Horse?" There is stupidity, not in the man who chose the name, but in the white man who made the translation. This was a young warrior of such valor and dauntlessness that the enemy was afraid, not only of him, but even of his horse when it appeared on the horizon. There is some sense in that. Yet the white man called him "Young-Man-Afraid-of-His-Horse."

Another example: A Chippewa chief lies buried on a reservation in Minnesota, and the stone over his grave bears the name "Hole-in-the-Day." Silly, absolutely silly! Again the misunderstanding white man. "Hole-in-the-Day" was the son of a young Chippewa chief who started on the war-path against my people, the Dakotas. He had been married but a few months to his young bride and he wished to make a splendid record as a leader. It was the first time he had led the war party, and he led with courage and strategy, but adventured himself so bravely, that the whole party came back victorious but brought their dead chief with them. Shortly afterward the son was born, and his mourning mother called him, "Rift-in-the-Cloud." It is a picture-name. A long dark day of cloud and rain, and shadow and sobbing trees; then, just as the sun sets, its rays break through a rift in the cloud and shine out across the plain. The little lad was a rift in the cloud of her sorrow and we called him "Hole-in-the-Day." And when he was dead, we put a two-ton monument on him and wrote "Hole-in-the-Day" on that. Such is our hopeless white stupidity.

Thirty years ago my father was a missionary on the Oneida reservation. I had a little sister, whose blue eyes and golden hair and sunny, sweet disposition completely won the hearts of the Indians. They gave her the name of Gajajawox. I tried to find out what it meant, but the old Indian smiled and shook his head, and said "No put in white man talk." The words did not fit, you see. Again it was a picture. We do not call things by pictures, we call them by names of so many letters. We have a very stiff and definite way of calling things, but the Indian draws a picture for a name. The picture they thought of in connection with my little sister was this: the wind blowing over a field of flowers and bringing you the perfume as it

came—the perfume of flowers borne on the summer breeze. Well, we would not have thought of a name like that and the white man, if she had been an Indian maiden, would have called her, "Smell-on-the-Breeze!" He certainly would; it is so simple and literal. It is impossible for us to give an accurate interpretation of that Mohawk name, and we are unable to get at the sensibilities, and the artistic touch, and the conceptions of beauty and of order that lie in the soul of the Indian. But let us believe in these things, for they are there.

The next thing which I find in the soul of the Indian is something which we are trying to recognize and minister to, but which we should have recognized sooner. Deep down in the soul of the Indian, as in the white man, there is a real ambition, a desire for leadership, a wish to do and to accomplish. In many ways still it is the undeveloped desire of a child, and he does not know just what it is he longs for, but the Indian wants to lead, and we have not been quick enough in giving him leadership. That, perhaps, is one of our common failures in missionary policy among foreign people. For the Indian problem *is* a foreign problem, and labor in the Dakotas is a good preparation for work in China or Japan. We have hesitated to give responsibility. We have felt that the white man must hold things in his own hands. We have not been willing to trust God with the souls of other people. We have wanted to keep a little hold on them ourselves. We were not quite confident that the riches of the Gospel could be trusted with these people unless we were nearby to help them understand. Yet they will get a different message from ours. God never speaks in the same terms to two human souls, nor to two different races. We must not be afraid to develop their sense of leadership.

I am thankful to say that I have inherited the wise leadership of a great man. I am a small person standing in the light of a great name. William Herbert Hare was the first bishop of South Dakota and the greatest friend of the Indian in the middle West. He had two convictions with which he began his work, and which he felt were absolutely necessary to success. The first was of the necessity of education. He founded schools, and the most helpful Indian men and women that I have today were educated in these early mission schools of Bishop Hare. Secondly, he believed that you cannot fully and permanently evangelize a people except through men of their own race; you cannot hand down religion as we have sometimes done, saying: "I am the man between these peoples and God." We must intro-

duce Jesus Christ to his own, and let His Spirit work in them. Yet we have feared to trust the fidelity and intelligence of these people, and have not utilized the Indian capacity for leadership. One present and immediate need is to develop leadership among the young people. The desire is there, the ability is there; it must be trained and carefully handled, but it can be developed. There are twenty-two Indian priests and deacons in South Dakota, and seventy men who serve in a lay ministry. Last Sunday three-fourths of the services held in our ninety chapels were conducted by laymen. I wonder what would happen if we were to ask our layman in the white field to render such service. The Indian is naturally religious, he does not think it remarkable to talk about religion, he discusses it as he would his crops. One is as real to him as the other, and as important. Yet we find it so hard to talk about these things naturally! An Indian man will stand up and make an address with all the simplicity and dignity and directness that you can imagine. He may be totally uneducated, but he can tell you in an effective way what religion means to him. So leadership is possible among the Indians and leadership in religion is already developed.

And then, down in the soul of the Indian, besides these things, I think there is—what may I call it?—the ability to stand fast; the integrity, the fundamental something that lies at the roots of a race which can be trusted; that something in human character to which you pin your faith. It is in the Indian people. It shows in their self-respect, in their dignity of procedure, in their courtesy towards others. I am sometimes a little ashamed of the attitude of white men toward Indians, in contrast with the courtesy of the Indians toward their white guests. I take people out occasionally to see my Dakotas. They are good people, Christian people, and yet one could see they felt as though they were going to a circus to see the animals. But did my Indian people fail to show courtesy and dignity and respect to them? Not at all. These things are fundamental in the Indian character. You never saw an Indian who was knowingly grotesque, or absurd, or foolish, or lacking in self-respect.

And so I contend that in the soul of the Indian are deep principles of character, tremendous possibilities of life and service that very few of us understand because we have approached life from a different angle. The angle is this: The Indian is a natural communist. By which I mean that the Indian thinks in terms of his group. The white man always thinks of himself first and his group last. We

approach things from the view-point of the individual. The Indian's point of view is that of the group; his relation to and his responsibility for the group. He thinks in group terms. He has a socialized concept of life. Society has been a definite thing to which he was responsible. The family life and the tribe life have an immediate bearing upon all his actions.

Many of the things that you and I cannot understand are explained by this truth. The only missionary of our Church in South Dakota ever killed by Indians was a white priest. He was shot by two Indians who had never seen him before, and to whom he had done no wrong. Apparently an utterly criminal murder—simply the bloodthirsty desire to kill! What other explanation could there be? So the white man writes the histories, and this is the answer he gives. Now, nobody excuses that act. But it was committed by two Indian men who had received a very terrible wrong at the hands of a white man. In their rebellion of soul they swore that when they got out of jail, where the white man had finally landed them, they would kill the first white man they met. Was there no excuse for them? No, none whatever, except that back in their consciousness was a sense of the responsibility of a group for the actions of the individuals who compose it. They held the white group responsible for the white man's sin. That was a part of their past history. They were unjustified, of course, absolutely wrong,—but back of their act was a deep-rooted sense of justice,—perverted, mistaken, but growing out of a communal sense of society's responsibility for those who compose it. They viewed the matter from a side exactly opposite to ours. They had no quarrel with the individual, they simply believed they were avenging a wrong that had been done to them by white men. Just bear that in mind, if you will, then, in your judgments of the Indian peoples. Remember that we are approaching the problems of life from exactly the opposite angle, and that a great many of the things which to us appear strange and unaccountable and wrong-side-out, may be explained if you will remember that the Indian is the product of a communized social order, and we are the product of an individualized social order.

Take the thriftlessness in the old days. Then a man would go out, be successful in his hunting, and eat up what he had killed all in one day. Wastefulness we call it; and in a way that is true. But the point was this: he brought in his deer or his buffalo, took what was necessary for his family, and then anybody in the group could come and take what he needed. The hunter did not feel that success had

come to him and to his alone. He did not say, "Go to, I must store this up for my own family in the days to come." He held that he had had success for the sake of the group, and that it was theirs as much as it was his.

Of course, the Indian must learn some new viewpoints if he is going to compete with the white man in civilized life. He must be able to meet the white man on his own ground. But it is hard to make an Indian believe that mere possession of a thing constitutes an absolute ownership, if someone needs it more than he—and I don't know but that he is right. Indeed, I hope we are in the way of re-adjusting some of our ideas of society and of economics a little more to the vision of the Indian soul.

I thank you for looking with me thus patiently into the soul of my brother, the Indian.

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